

**SIGAR**Office of the Special Inspector General  
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

## Lessons Learned Record of Interview

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<b>SIGAR Attendees:</b>					
Candace Rondeaux, Sonia Pinto					
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<b>Prepared By:</b> (Name, title and date)					
Candace Rondeaux and Sonia Pinto					
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Management of staff</li><li>• Recruitment and retention of personnel</li><li>• Civilian Surge</li></ul>					

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C)

### Origins of the Tiger Team and Evolution of the Surge

In 2009, there were 85 AID people in Afghanistan. State was virtually screaming at AID every week for more, more, more. Undersecretary (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) was pushing hard for USAID to send more people out but the problem was that the USAID staff had been greatly reduced in the 1990's. We lost



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hundreds of FSI's and veterans and mentors. Our numbers had been greatly cut and here we go with Iraq and Afghanistan and all of the sudden the pressure was on.

We didn't have enough people so AID looked into stop gap measures and looked into ways to short cut and get people on board fast. They looked into the 3161 term limited appointments. But the target kept moving. State kept raising the numbers. In January 2010, there were 215 AID people in Afghanistan. In January 2011, there were 299. There were 387 in January 2013. At the end the target go to 450. [The business analysis team has been charting the numbers since the beginning. Can contact them for exact figures for 2001-2014]. There was all this push then the U.S. government decides to reduce our military presence and as the military started slowing down security became an issue.

We're now down to 120-125 with less than a handful in the Regional Commands. There are one or two in Kandahar but most are in Kabul. If the military closes the Regional Commands do we have anyone to look at projects out there? We're going from a situation in the field where more than half our people were deployed to the regional commands to most now sitting in Kabul so the mindset though completely changes. At the Regional Commands the AID people were helping the military think through how to use CERP funds and USAID officially or unofficially was signing off on it.

There was plenty of money and plenty of support throughout the whole process. Money wasn't a problem. The problem was the shortage of people. USAID had gone through a rift in the late 1990s and had never staffed up again.

### **Navigating the Bureaucracy/Setting Up for the Surge**

[The main vehicle for performing an end run around the hiring bureaucracy was the Foreign Service Limited designation, which allowed USAID to hire people for up to a three year term]. S/CRS were mainly getting short term people in who would do six months, nine months maximum. It took six years to redevelop the leadership after it had been lost in the 1990s. It's taken 15 years to rebuild the capacity again just to this point.

We were trying to bring people on at the FS-5/FS-6 level. But then they needed to be mentored so you had to bring into the mix more training and a new curriculum.

***"Funding to rebuild Afghanistan and Iraq wasn't a problem. Funding to build up USAID was a real problem."***

(b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) worked the portfolio on hiring and knows more about the FSL process].

Getting the staff inducted was a challenge. We arrived in 2010. HR [now Human Capital and Talent Management] –they had real trouble ramping up and getting a lot of people on board. They took extraordinary measures to get it done. They hired an institutional contractor to vet and screen people. Then they stood up the Tiger Team [which consists of 8 people to support personnel administration for Afghanistan]. AVUE was the government contractor hired to do a quick and dirty screening. Then they lost the contract. Then Monster.com came in 2012.

[The Tiger Team then hired an institutional contractor to do a second review because the initial screening through the online screening process was not as efficient in detecting deficiencies in applications.]

A lot of people were saying they had years of development experience but they had worked in France or England for years and didn't know anything about working in tough conditions. So we



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brought in subject matter experts to do further interviews after the initial screening process. At best the whole process might take six to nine months from application to actually hiring someone.

The security and medical clearance can take a long time. The system takes a long time and these are top secret clearances that are needed and that takes a long time.

We were looking for experience in technical areas. We were looking to see did they have experience so they wouldn't be shocked when they go out to some of these places where the conditions are hard.

Then there were reference checks. They had to provide three to five reference checks and that also took time because not everyone was available or living in the States. If they scored well on the reference checks we'd send their names to the field to see what they'd say. In most cases they went with our recommendation. We're old experienced hands so they knew that we knew what to look for in someone. Then a decision memo would be sent to the office of foreign service personnel then there would be the security check and the medical clearance process.

This was all happening in the middle of a recession. Recession pressures made it hard because people were not exactly running to tell their boss hey I'm about to leave. No one wanted to make a move until they had that letter of guarantee from the government in hand. [So additional time would be lost to transitioning from one job to a USAID position]. It takes a long time and that had an impact on how quickly we could respond to the call for more civilians to be sent to the field.

Then people have life changing events in the middle of the whole process—they get married, they have a baby so they drop out of the process. There were a whole bunch who dropped out because of life changes.

**[Contact (b)(3), (b)(6), (b)(7)(C) for more information on how staffing for CPC countries is handled]**

State set the 3161's for a year but a year is not long enough. We have had many recommendations based on inform from the field that suggest the one year time frame in these conditions is not enough. You have people out there in the most hellish conditions and the question is do you want someone in a combat experience for more than a year.

On a normal tour for a country that's more in the traditional development model the term is four years. You spend the first year to learn where you are and understand your counterparts and learn who to trust who not to trust. One year in my opinion is not enough. [tours in more stable areas where conflict is less predominant like in Latin America and parts of Africa are two year tours].

### **Rotations and Civ-mil frictions**

Development is a long term process and it takes you five to ten years to make institutional change happen. So a one year tour—it's hard to say what you can accomplish the jury's still out on that. In these conditions it's challenging. Just imagine you get out there with ten Humvees and shooters who are very anxious to get out of there and you're trying to make connections with people and build trust.

**Interviewee (a)** - I don't know how much you can accomplish in a combat zone. If you're in a PRT or DST the military commander is in charge and that's it. One year is a very short of time you're in a town where you've got a mayor who's asking for this or that and who has his priorities. You're trying to develop trust and then it's "See you in a couple of weeks and I'm going on R & R." Then the next person comes and starts asking the same questions that the first person is asked. "What are your priorities? What are your development needs?"



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### Training and Curriculum

We hired a contractor—ENCOMPASS—to give two weeks training on “what is Afghanistan” what is the culture and how do you get along with the military—what are the do’s and do’s. It was basically the ABC’s of dealing with the military. There was also the one week of crash and bang training and the training in Indiana at the simulated Afghan village. We recommend many people to get training on contracting and cooperative agreements. There was a crash course on contracts and grants.

A lot of the FSL’s were non AID people, people who worked for the Peace Corps or in NGO’s they didn’t know much about contracting so we had to train them on how to monitor and collect information on programs. HR kept getting missives from the field to send better trained people.

### Challenges with Living Conditions and Communications

The people in the embassy were saying well 387 is not enough we need 450 and we’re saying well where are you going to put people. There’s no space. You had people living two to three in a container it was very uncomfortable. Then you had wet containers and dry containers while the big shots lived in the apartments. It’s a goat rodeo from beginning to end. We’re not in charge of housing, State is. Then you have people rotating out all at the same time. It was a disaster of scheduling.

### Potential Lessons Observed

Lesson 1) Reduction in delays in hiring, training and deployment is critical

- a) Greatest gains may come from harmonizing security and medical clearance processes and creating a MOU on the applicability of interagency clearances between key stakeholders for stability operations (DOD, State, USAID)
- b) All clearances above the confidential level should be portable across the interagency
- c) Processes for clearances should be standardized across the interagency

Lesson 2) Tours of duty should be set at a two-year minimum with an option to renew for one additional year

- a) Extended tours of duty would require a reassessment of the home leave and RR allotments and scheduling
- b) Reassessment of Regional RR’s would be critical to supporting longer stays in conflict zones; define hubs for regions where it’s clear that prolonged interventions will be needed; goal would be 4-5 hour max flight time to cut down on time lost for R&R
- c) Augment Afghan Hands like programs so there is a constant reserve of specialists

Lesson 3) Conduct a dynamic series of workforce model assessments for conflict zone interventions

- a) Since many of the affected areas are in the Middle East, Central Africa and Central Asia look into building “offshore hubs” for staff to be based in say Almaty and Dubai
- b) Develop more robust assessments for position and skills requirements

**Right now the embassy set a new level to 110 but it may go down to 85. At a certain point you have more programs to monitor than you have people and you have to ask how many people does it take to push this money out for programming.**

Lessons 4) Develop assessments and metrics for understanding phased development interventions

When do you add the civilian element? What’s the line between humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and development?



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When you're bringing out the civilians you need to know what you want them to do; what skill sets do you need to get the job done.

It was easier to look at the needs in Kabul [to build out position requirements] because that's more like what you have in traditional development missions in more stable countries like in Latin America. But as you start looking at RC's, PRT's and DST's you have a lot of different variables.

### **On the Civ-Mil Divide, Strategy and CERP**

The other challenge was deciding who should be making development decisions. A colonel is there for 9 months. He wants to see development impact right away. If the mayor says he wants a clinic does that make sense if the Ministry of Health can't provide the medical staff to make it work?

One of the tricks of stabilization and development is that it should be a continuum where you have humanitarian crisis response leading into stabilization and reconstruction leading into development.

[Emphasis should be on long term strategy for the country]

***"With the AfPak strategy there was a present under the Christmas tree for everyone. By the time you were finished you had so many priorities and aspirations it was like no strategy at all. If you have 50 priorities then you don't have any priorities at all."***

To do everything in the strategy you needed infrastructure. The problem with infrastructure was USAID wanted to do farm to market roads-simple stuff. And the ambassador at the time was saying we're going to build highways. But why are you building highways if you have no capacity to sustain them, repair them.

We had no voice. There's two capital D's and a small D in the Triple D approach and development is the little D.

Under the way things were set up with the military in control of the PRT's it was a question of incentives. If you're a commander and you don't spend, you fail that was the message with CERP. CERP had unintended consequences. No one was looking at if you go out and dig a well in a district where there's already problems with the water table being low what kind of conflict does that start.

With CERP why not work in places where you can show results in a decent time frame.

It's very disruptive to have that kind of money available. Ultimately, what you want when you're designing programs is for the locals and the local government to have skin in the game. By just throwing money at a problem you're undercutting local initiative. In traditional development countries, you go in; you do an assessment; you find out what can be done; you find out what the government wants to do. You can't do everything.